Following God's Cloud

Chas Leeper 15 March 2023



After seven months with Joshua Generation Church, Chas and Janet Leeper returned to the USA in January this year, where they planted their church in Newport Beach, Southern California, on Easter Sunday, 9 April 2023.

But what prompted this real estate professional to leave the security of his home and job, together with his wife and four children, to come to South Africa – what did they hope to see and experience? And what did that stir in their hearts to replicate in their hometown?

Divine Connections

Having grown up in an NCMI (New Covenant Ministries International) church, Chas was exposed to Dudley Daniel's teachings from a young age. He recalls how his parents moved to Newport to support an NCMI church plant, but ended up planting with Lon Whelan (currently on Heritage Christian Fellowship leadership, a Four12 partnering church in San Clemente, California) instead.

Although Chas later moved on to another church where he served as a part-time elder until 2021, he remained friends with Lon, and it was through Lon (at that time on eldership in Joshua Generation Church (JoshGen)) that Chas was introduced to JoshGen and the Four12 Global

partnership of churches in 2019, when Lon arranged for Mervis van der Merwe and Lukas Nakos to minister with Chas at their home group in Newport. This was followed by an invitation to Chas and some of his (then) leadership team to attend an elders training time in Cape Town in 2020.

> **"God's cloud is moving and we have to follow"**

For Chas, this training time unlocked things that he had heard taught years ago, but through a fresh apostolic grace. This was the kind of church to which he had always longed to belong: one built on the Word and the Spirit, in which every saint lived out New Testament Christianity, and where we strive not for numbers but for fruit in people's lives. His eyes were opened to the way in which Jesus wants His church built, and he dared not go back to "doing pragmatic church", as is the norm for so many churches in the USA.

Meanwhile, back in the USA, Chas' wife told a friend that she'd had a dream about selling their house. Amazed, the friend asked why they would sell their dream house, to which Janet replied, "God's cloud is moving and we have to follow".

Shortly after Chas returned to the USA, Covid-19 hit the world and it shut everything down. While his connection with Four12 remained strong and his heart was still moved to build church with this new revelation and perspective, it took almost two years before Andrew Selley was able to visit California, along with his sister, Janette, and her husband, Jacques du Toit (now leading JoshGen Sunningdale PM). Longing for his wife to experience something of what he had experienced at the Four12 Conference in South Africa a few months earlier, Chas had a real sense that Janet had to meet Janette – that it would be a divine appointment – and he was right! The families' hearts were instantly connected, and Chas and Janet themselves started experiencing a new oneness of heart, mind and purpose to build God's church God's way.

Following God to South Africa

Little could they have imagined that a few years later, their entire family would move into Jacques and Janette's home for seven months – to be exposed to, learn from and become part of the JoshGen family! In Janette's words, "When they came, they gave their hearts and we gave ours".

During this time, they sat under many teachings and had the opportunity to closely observe and learn from Andrew and the elders about the different aspects of leading a church and pastoring God's people. But they also experienced what an Acts 2:42 church looks like – saints devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship (in church, but also in one another's

homes), to the breaking of bread and to prayer, where signs and wonders are still a reality, and people are getting saved and added to family on a regular basis.

> **Even the children testified that their lives have been changed forever**

What particularly stood out for Chas is the desire of both the leaders and saints to obey God – even when doing so is unpopular, inconvenient or comes at a high price. He was also deeply impacted by how seriously Andrew and the elders take their calling and responsibility before God, and their devotion to the church. And, of course, the hospitality of all!

Even the children testified that their lives have been changed forever by what they experienced in those seven months, especially through the friendships formed. They were particularly impacted by how they "all stood up for each other" (Hailey, Grade 6), and that "everyone was together, no matter the age" (Liberty, Grade 3).

The Cloud Back to California

Coming to South Africa, Chas never thought that their journey would lead them back to Newport to plant a church – but God had different plans!

Over the last few weeks of their visit, it became clear that this was indeed where God was leading them. Chas tells of a special encounter that he had with the Lord shortly before their return, where the Lord spoke to Him out of John 21:15-17 and commissioned him to "feed His sheep".

They are currently meeting in a saint's home while they look for a venue (watch this space!). As they plant Joshua Generation Church Newport Beach, the Leeper family is very sure that God's heart is for the restoration of His Bride, the church. That she would be built not on the ability or strength of man, but on the Scriptures and the leading of the Spirit; not based on performance, but on the presence of God among His people.

Please pray for them as they continue to trust God to show them the next steps for following His cloud.

*Since this was written, the Newport Beach congregation has been planted, secured a permanent venue and experienced growth. The congregation is led by Lukas & AnnMargaret Nakos. The Leeper family have since joined the San Clemente congregation.